

Q&A ABOUT ISLAM AND AMERICAN MUSLIMS

Q: What is Islam?

A: Islam is not a new religion. It is the same truth that God revealed to all His prophets (Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, etc.) throughout history. Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy and forgiveness.

Q: Who are Muslims and what do they believe?

A: Muslims believe in One, Unique, and Incomparable God, creator of the universe. They believe in the Day of Judgement and individual accountability for actions. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets beginning with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus. God's eternal message was reaffirmed and finalized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on them all). One becomes a Muslim by saying, "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." By this declaration, the person announces faith in all of God's messengers. There are an estimated 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide. No more than 20 percent of Muslims live in the Arabic-speaking world. The country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia.

Q: What is the Quran?

A: The Quran is the record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. It was memorized by Muhammad and then dictated to his companions. The text of the Quran was cross-checked during the life of the Prophet. The 114 chapters of the Quran have remained unchanged through the centuries. Translations of the meaning of the Quran exist in almost all languages.

Q: What are the "Five Pillars" of Islam?

A: 1) The Declaration of Faith - This consists of the two sentence declaration described above.

2) Prayer - Muslims perform five obligatory prayers each day. Islamic prayers are a direct link between the worshiper and God. Islam has no hierarchical authority or priesthood. A learned Muslim chosen by each congregation leads the prayers.

3) Zakat - One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God and that wealth is held in trust by human beings. Zakat, or charitable giving, "purifies" wealth by setting aside a portion for those in need. This payment is usually two and a half percent of one's capital. 4) Fasting - Every year in the Islamic lunar month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from first light until sunset. The fast is another method of self-purification. 5) Pilgrimage - A pilgrimage to Mecca, or Hajj, is an obligation for those who are physically or financially able.

Q: What about the American Muslim community?

A: There are an estimated 7 million Muslims in America. The Muslim community in America is made up of people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and

national origins. There are almost 2,000 mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic centers in America. Muslims are active in all walks of life. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in this country and around the world.

Q: What about Muslim women?

A: Under Islamic law, women have always had the right to own property, receive an education and otherwise take part in community life. Men and women are to be respected equally. The Islamic rules for modest dress apply to both women and men equally. (Men cannot expose certain parts of their bodies, wear gold or silk, etc.) If a particular society oppresses women, it does so in spite of Islam, not because of it.

Q: What is *Jihad*?

A: “Jihad” does not mean “holy war.” Literally, *jihad* means to strive, struggle and exert effort. It is a central and broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil inclinations within oneself, struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense (e.g., - having a standing army for national defense), or fighting against tyranny or oppression.

ISLAM IN AMERICA

There are an estimated 7 million Muslims in America. The Muslim community in America is made up of people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and national origins. The worldwide population of Muslims is 1.2 billion. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in this country and around the world. Demographers say that Islam will soon be the number two religion in America. (This may have already occurred.) Demographers also say that by the year 2025, one in four people on earth will be a Muslim. There are more than 2,000 mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic centers in America. Muslims are active in all walks of life.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Allah - Allah is the Arabic word for “God.” It is the same word Arabic-speaking Christians use when referring to God. Allah is not the “Muslim God,” but is the same God worshipped by Christians and Jews.

Fundamentalist - Muslims view the label “fundamentalist” as stereotypical and ill defined. Muslims also object to the use of terms such as “radical” and “extremist.” These terms lack definition and are seen as pejorative. A more neutral and objective term is “Islamic activist.” If the person in question is involved in a criminal act, name that act, not the faith of the person who commits the crime.

Jihad - “Jihad” does not mean “holy war.” Literally, *jihad* means to strive, struggle and exert effort. It is a central and broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil inclinations within oneself, struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense (e.g., - having a standing army for national defense), or fighting against tyranny or oppression. The equivalent of the term “holy war” in Arabic is “harb muqaddasah,” a term that cannot be found

in the Quran or the Prophet's sayings (hadith). There is no such thing as "holy war" in Islam, as some careless translators may imply. It is rather a loaded medieval concept that did not arise from within the Muslim community. Because of this myth's frequent repetition, most people in the West accept it as if it were a fact.

Black Muslims - This term, first used to describe the followers of the late Elijah Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam, is no longer accurate when used to describe African-American Muslims. Minister Louis Farrakhan does not represent the Muslim community in America.

Muslim/Arab - Not all Muslims are Arab, just as not all Arabs are Muslim. In fact, Arabs are a minority within the Islamic world. According to modern usage, "Arab" is a linguistic, not an ethnic, designation. An Arab can be Christian or Jewish.

Women's Rights - Under Islamic law, women have always had the right to own property, receive an education and otherwise take part in community life. The Islamic rules for modest dress apply to women and men equally. (Men cannot expose certain parts of their bodies, wear gold or silk, etc.) If a particular society oppresses women, it does so in spite of Islam, not because of it.

Arabic Names - Compound Arabic last names, such as "Abd Al-Wahid," which often refer to attributes of God, should be used in full on second reference. If the second reference referred to "Al-Wahid," that person would be taking on an attribute of God ("the One"), something a Muslim would abhor.